

FAST TRACK



The Sweet Life

TIRAMI SU. THE NAME MAY sound Japanese (some kind of sushi?), but it's Italian—a cool, sweet-tasting, layered dessert that, one food reporter has written, "appears to be the dessert of 1985."

Tiramisu means "lift me up," a nod to espresso, its prime flavoring. The dish, which differs from restaurant to restaurant, is essentially espresso-soaked sponge cake or ladyfingers filled with a mixture of egg and sugar blended with fresh mascarpone, the double-cream Italian cheese that's become so popular these past few years. The top of the dessert is dusted with cocoa or shavings of bittersweet chocolate.

When you order tiramisu at Prima Donna, Primavera, Positano, Il Cantinori, or L'Hostaria del Bongustaio,



you're served a charlotte-style dessert. Primavera's tiramisu is sometimes made by Sant Ambroeus, whose version contains heavy cream rather than mascarpone.

The dessert's taste varies from sweet to very sweet and the texture from supple to runny. Yet for an Italian

dessert so much in vogue, tiramisu lacks the brisk and exquisite simplicity of zuppa inglese and the dazzle of

other dolci. Still, people ask for it. Why?

An Italian-cookbook writer thinks it has caught on "because it has all the flavors tourists identify with Italian desserts: espresso, chocolate, mascarpone—it came in on the coattails of mascarpone."

But one restaurateur says tiramisu is hot because it looks harmless. "There's no top crust, so one does not have the feeling of eating heavy pastry," he says. "It is so very light, but still, we serve it with two spoons."

BARBARA COSTIKYAN

BRIEFLIVES

BODY ENGLISH

CHOREOGRAPHER YOSHICO CHUMA DOESN'T like to sit still. During a recent rehearsal for her newest work, *A Boy, a Beer and a Blonde* (at Dance Theater Workshop through March 4), she smoked cigarette after cigarette, putting each one out in a silver bread pan that she carried as she circled the room, observing from every angle as four of her company members ran through a precision drill. Chuma watched as they lifted chairs over their heads, jumped on top of them, crawled under, over, and around them, and then, after ten minutes, paused.

"Could you go faster?" she asked.

Chuma's work is made up of rapid-fire short takes, and it's full of the stuff of everyday life. In the last two years, she and her company, the School of Hard Knocks, have performed all over town—from the streets to the Pyramid club to the Japan Society. In 1983, her *Five Car Pile-Up* used a weather balloon, ten bicycles, 70 copies of the New York Post, sixteen toothbrushes, thirteen telephone books, and more than 60 performers. One critic called her *A Night at the Millionaire's Club* "the most aesthetically superior [and] moving performance around." And last year, she won a Bessie award for choreography.

Chuma came to New York in 1976 from Osaka, Japan. Friends who had visited America had told her, "Yoshiko, you should go to downtown in New York." So, after a long period of student activism in the seventies and two years in a collective theater group, Chuma, who spoke almost no English, flew to New York on a budget flight. "The first two

or three years here," she says, "speaking English is like 24 hours performing."

During her first few years in the city, she studied with Robert Wilson, Mabou Mines, Merce Cunningham, and Douglas Dunn; by 1978, she was doing her own works in



downtown spaces. And by 1979, she had made her first film. "I loved that—the cutting and the editing and slow motion and pixilation. Making the movie made my originality come out."

Of *A Boy*, Chuma says, "I thought I'd like to have a quieter piece." Quiet, though, is not the first word that comes to mind. Although the work has only six performers, it also has the chair ballet, a chorus of TV-commercial jingles (which Chuma directs, arms and legs flailing), and a backdrop with cutout sections through which the performers stick their heads, *Laugh-In*-style. It deals, Chuma says, with American history from 1945 to 1985. "But I don't think the people will realize the American history," she says. "It's basically a conversation."

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